

Lumbar Sympathetic Block Information

1. What is the Lumbar Sympathetic Block Information and why is it performed?

A lumbar sympathetic block is used to help diagnose and treat different types of neuropathic (nerve injury or irritation) pain in your legs or feet. This pain is usually burning and you may have sensitivity to any type of light touch. The lumbar sympathetic ganglia are small bundles of nerves in your back. The nerves in the lumbar sympathetic ganglia are called sympathetic nerves and problems with these nerves will often cause the burning pain and sensitivity in your leg or foot. A lumbar sympathetic block temporarily turns these nerves off. You may receive a repeat lumbar sympathetic block if the first was helpful.

2. What will happen to me during the procedure?

When you enter the clinic, you will be taken into an admission room where a nurse will check your vitals. Please wear loose-fitting clothing and note that you may be asked to change into a hospital gown. After your vitals are taken, an IV will be placed so that you can receive sedation during the procedure. Once you have been escorted to the procedure room, our nursing staff will then position you on narrow table. The site of the procedure will be cleaned with iodine and sterilely draped. Once sterilized, the physician will numb your skin with a small needle – the numbing process may sting. Do your best to lay still and let us know if we are causing you discomfort.

Next, a very small needle is inserted into your lower back near the spine on the affected side. More than one needle may be used. The needle will be inserted under x-ray as this helps guide the needle to the correct position. When the needle is in the right position, local anesthetic will be injected into the lumbar sympathetic ganglia to “turn off” the nerves. After your procedure, the nurses in the recovery room will watch you closely.

3. What should I do and expect after the procedure?

After the lumbar sympathetic block is performed you will notice certain symptoms that may be present for up to 8-12 hours. You may notice increased warmth and redness of the leg and foot. Rarely, you may have some numbness or weakness of the leg or foot. Again, these symptoms are only temporary and will go away in time. Since these symptoms are present and since you have likely had sedation, you will need a ride home. You will need to avoid the following activities until these sensations have passed: walking, climbing, driving and any exertion.

Most importantly, we want to know if your pain is improved and to what extent. It is not uncommon to have complete pain relief, only partial relief or no relief at all. You will be asked to keep a pain diary to help you keep track of the level of pain you experience after your procedure. We will discuss this at your next visit.

4. For what reasons should I call Pain Specialists of Charleston after the injection?

You should call us immediately at 843-818-1181 if you experience any of the following:

- Severe back pain that is not relieved with medication and ice
- Prolonged, new numbness or weakness of your legs
- Signs of infection in the area of injection

NOTE: If you experience loss of bladder and/or bowels control OR difficulty breathing, please go to the nearest emergency room immediately.